DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 127 305 95 SP 010 342

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TITLE How to Suceed in Team Teaching--By Really Trying. Occasional Paper No. 13.
INSTITUTION Stanford Univ., Calif. Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.; Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Jul 76
GRANT OEG-6007502009
NOTE 13p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1 67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cooperative Planning; *Effective Teaching; Guidelines; Interpersonal Competence; Teaching Techniques; *Team Administration; *Team Teaching

ABSTRACT

This paper provides guidelines in three areas for organizing and working in teaching teams: (1) getting started; (2) making the most of team meetings; and (3) minimizing team problems. Getting started requires a number of key decisions: (1) on what basis should team members be selected? (2) what should be the size of the team? (3) what areas should teams coordinate? (4) how much time should be allotted for planning, and when should time be scheduled? and (5) what support personnel are needed? Team meetings can be made productive by following a few simple procedures; one team member should be selected at each meeting to prepare and circulate the agenda for the next meeting; the agenda should be short so that all items are discussed, or a standard agenda may be used; all information and materials needed to accomplish the goals of the agenda should be a gathered and distributed at the meeting by the person selected to organize the agenda; all tasks should be specifically assigned with a completion date set; and a list of decisions, tasks, etc., can prevent misunderstandings. Finally it is acknowledged that staff resistance, personality clashes, unequal participation, poor attendance, and community/parent resistance are few of the problems that may be encountered. (DMT)

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ED127305

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HOW TO SUCCEED IN TEAM TEACHING--BY REALLY TRYING

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July 1976

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Published by the Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching, supported in part as a research and development center by funds from the National Institute of Education and the Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position, policy, or endorsement of the National Institute of Education or the Office of Education. (Contract No. OEG-60075 02009.)

SP 010 342

Introductory Statement

The mission of the Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching is to improve teaching in American schools. Current major operations include three research and development programs--Teaching Effectiveness, The Environment for Teaching, and Teaching and Linguistic Pluralism--and two programs combining research and technical assistance, the Stanford Urban/Rural Leadership Training Institute and the Hoover/Stanford Teacher Corps Project. The ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources is also a part of the Center. A program of exploratory and related studies provides for smaller studies not part of the major programs.

This paper is based on part of the authors' work for the Teacher Corps Project funded by the Office of Education and jointly sponsored by Stanford University and Herbert Hoover Junior High School in San Jose, California. It is addressed to teachers and administrators who wish to implement a team-teaching program, as well as to pre- and in-service educators concerned with preparing teachers for team teaching. This paper provides guidelines in three areas for organizing and working in teaching teams: getting started, making the most of team meetings, and minimizing team problems.

Acknowledgments

For their helpful criticisms of earlier drafts of this paper the authors thank Patricia Fitzgerald, Gary Garfield, Mary Gauvain, Barbara McFarren, Pauline Zemaitis, and Mary Louise Zingheim.

For their invaluable cooperation and assistance the authors are indebted to the administration and faculty of Herbert Hoover Junior High School, San Jose, California. Dr. Elizabeth Cohen, Director of the Environment for Teaching Program at the Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching, has conducted research on team teaching for the past decade. We are especially grateful to Dr. Cohen for the assistance she has provided at every step of our work.

Any strengths in this paper can be attributed to our colleagues at Hoover Junior High School and Stanford University. Responsibility for all errors and omissions is ours alone.

R. R. Nolan
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HOW TO SUCCEED IN TEAM TEACHING--BY REALLY TRYING

Robert R. Nolan and Susan Stavert Roper

"Working on a team is a great experience. Being able to share and try out new ideas with other adults has made me love teaching even more." These are the words of a teacher who is obviously delighted with her new role as a member of a teaching team. Other teachers in teams agree with her. They emphasize the pleasure and professional growth gained by regularly sharing their ideas and experiences with their colleagues. They claim that their talents are more successfully employed in the classroom because they are able to do the things they do best as they share the workload with other teachers. These teachers are convinced that students benefit from interaction with more than one teacher, a greater variety of instructional techniques, and more thorough evaluation. They say they would never return to the isolation of teaching alone in their "own" classroom.

Unfortunately, this is not the complete picture of teachers' attitudes toward team teaching. In talking with teachers, we heard many mention personality clashes rather than colleague support. These teachers were more likely to describe giving long lectures to groups of over a hundred students than eagerly implementing a variety of instructional approaches. They complained of wasting time in long unproductive team meetings. Many believed they did much more work than some of their "teammates." They were convinced that teachers as well as students suffer under this "exciting innovation" of the 1960's. Given these attitudes, it is not surprising that many teachers who tried teaming are no longer in teams. Yet some have succeeded in team teaching by maintaining relatively stable, satisfying, and instructionally varied teams.

Why do some teams "work" while others "fail"? We have been grappling with this question in our efforts to encourage one faculty to try team teaching. These efforts were part of our work in helping prepare the faculty at Herbert Hoover Junior High School in San Jose, California,

for their new open-space building. As university staff members of the Stanford University/Hoover Teacher Corps Project, we reviewed the literature on team teaching, met with various "experts" in the field, interviewed teachers on successful and not-so-successful teams, and visited schools to see team teaching in action.

Drawing on these sources of information we arrived at a tentative answer to our question. The main reason some teams succeed while others fail can be summarized in two words: effort and preparation. All the teachers we spoke to mentioned that team teaching requires more work than traditional teaching and warned that teachers who are not willing to expend more time and effort than they are accustomed to doing should not attempt to team teach. These teachers also said that adequate preparation for teaming is rare and sorely needed. There was some variation in the type and amount of preparation teachers received, but in general, it was inadequate and poorly planned. Many reported receiving no assistance whatsoever and said they were merely told to implement team teaching on their own.

The purpose of this paper is to provide guidelines in three areas for organizing and working in teaching teams: getting started, making the most of team meetings, and minimizing common team problems. It is addressed to teachers who have already made the commitment to give team teaching an honest chance by putting forth the effort it requires.

Getting Started

Before a teaching team is organized a number of key decisions must be made. First, on what basis should team members be selected? Problems increase when people are forced to adopt an innovation, so it is best if teams are formed from volunteers. Most teachers prefer to choose their own teammates, but veterans of successful teams have told us that friendship is not necessarily the best criterion for choosing teammates. A better criterion is teachers' skills and interests. Teachers should assess their own interests and competencies and share their self-assessments with one another. These assessments can be used to match

teachers with complementary competencies so as to create balanced instructional teams. When possible, teachers on the same team should have similar educational philosophies, though this is not absolutely necessary if the team adopts and follows rules for managing their team-teaching program. If a vacancy occurs in an already existing team, it is wise for administrators to allow team members to take part in selecting a new team member.

Second, what should the size of the team be? While teams as large as five or six are reported in the literature, the most common sizes in practice are two or three teachers.[1] Larger teams have greater difficulty coordinating their work and communicating among the members; scheduling and space limitations may also restrict team size. The larger the team, however, the greater the variety of talents and knowledge available to students.

Third, is what areas should teams coordinate? Teachers should agree at the outset on exactly what types of coordination they will work to achieve. Dr. Elizabeth Cohen, in her extensive research on teaming, has identified four basic types of team coordination.[2] The most common types of coordination are coordination of student discipline, joint planning of instruction, and team evaluation of students. Once team members are collaborating successfully in these areas, they can begin to plan for the rarest, but what some teachers consider the most exciting, type of coordination--joint teaching. In joint teaching, team members not only plan lessons together but actually conduct activities with one another for a common group of students. Teams that teach jointly also coordinate planning of instruction, evaluation, and discipline. When teachers are ready to teach together as a team, they should initially plan to teach jointly only for one or two weeks. A more ambitious plan would probably be overwhelming at first. This short effort should convince the team that it can succeed at this complex but rewarding task.

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[1]Elizabeth G. Cohen, "Problems and Prospects of Teaming," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Sociology of Education Association, Asilomar, California, February 1976, p. 5. Published as SCRDT R&D Memorandum No. 143, July 1976.

[2]Cohen, pp. 2-4.

Fourth, how much time is needed for team planning, and when should that time be scheduled? The amount of time needed for team planning will depend on the number of team members and the types of coordination they agree to implement. Most schools with viable teaching teams have common preparation periods for team members. Other team meetings can be held before or after school or during lunch. Early-morning meetings are particularly effective for reviewing the plans for the day. After-school meetings are most appropriate for feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the day's activities and for bringing up grievances. In addition, many teams meet for one or two weeks during the summer for long-range planning.

Fifth, what kind of team leadership arrangements should be made? A variety of leadership arrangements are found in practice. A permanent leader may be appointed or elected, as is commonly done among larger teams. At the intermediate and high school levels, the department chairperson often assumes this position. However, other research suggests that teams with formal leaders have lower morale and are less satisfied than teams without permanent, formal leaders.[3] A team can get the benefits of leadership without permanency and formality by changing the team leader each week, month, or grading period. Such an arrangement encourages the less outgoing team members to take a more active role in team meetings. Each member of the team also can become a task leader. For example, one teacher may be responsible for ordering materials and equipment while another is in charge of home contacts. This leadership arrangement can effectively utilize different teacher talents and will save time in dealing with specific problems. Leaderless teams are most common among small, especially two-person, teams.

Sixth, what support personnel are needed? Certain individuals other than team members are very important in making a successful teaching team. The support of school administrators is especially critical in

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[3]Marjorie S. Arikado and Donald F. Musella, "Status Variables Related to Team Teacher Satisfaction in the Open Plan School," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, February 1973.

scheduling common preparation periods, helping with organizational problems, and explaining the new teacher work arrangements to parents and district personnel. Administrative support can usually be increased if administrators are involved in planning from the start, periodically attend team meetings, and meet with team representatives regularly. A cooperative librarian or media center director is also essential, since increased use of the library and individualized materials often accompanies the implementation of team teaching. If the school has aides, their time should be shared by all team members. Aides should also be included in all planning and preparation sessions and their input should be encouraged.

Making the Most of Team Meetings

A few simple procedures can go a long way toward changing boring, unproductive team meetings to satisfying and productive ones. We recommend that each meeting have an agenda which is distributed at least one day prior to the meeting. One team member should be selected at each meeting to prepare and circulate the agenda for the following meeting. The agenda should be short enough so that all items can be discussed within the time limits of the meeting. A typical agenda might include two or three of the following topics: preparation of next week's lesson plans, a particular student's behavior and/or learning problems, regrouping of students, a specific grievance of a team member, criticism of a particular unit or lesson, a parent's complaint or inquiry, and preparation of report cards. Some teams use a standing agenda at regular weekly or monthly meetings to insure that all important matters are regularly discussed; but other teams find that a standing agenda inhibits flexibility and they prefer to deal with problems as they arise.

All information and materials needed to accomplish the goals of the agenda should be gathered and distributed at the meeting by the team leader, task leader(s), or member responsible for the agenda. Each task which needs to be accomplished should be assigned to a specific team member, and a date for the completion of each task should be set. He or

she should record all team decisions in a team notebook.[4] Team teachers have told us that a record of all team decisions can help prevent future misunderstandings.

Minimizing Team Problems

Problems will inevitably arise in planning for and conducting a team teaching program. Here are some of the more common problems and some suggestions for minimizing them.

Staff resistance. There are some very good reasons why many teachers are reluctant to team teach. One is that teachers have traditionally worked in isolation from one another.[5] Another is that the decision to team teach is often made by administrative fiat. Perhaps most important are teachers' fears of potential personality clashes with their fellow team members.

Providing the maximum possible information about teaming should help overcome initial faculty reluctance. Visits to schools with successful teams and presentations by veteran team members are usually very effective because teachers consider practicing teachers more credible than other types of consultants.[6] Teachers can also review the literature on team teaching and report their findings to potential team members.

Allowing teachers to choose their own teammates and implementing teaming gradually also smoothe the way. If a few teachers serve as a "pilot" team, their success may convince others.

Personality clashes. After being isolated in their own classrooms, teachers are often fearful of working closely with their colleagues.

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[4]Personal Communication from Mary Louise Zingheim, Elementary and Secondary Supervisor, Division of Instruction. San Jose Unified School District, San Jose, California.

[5]Dan C. Lortie, "The Balance of Control and Autonomy in Elementary School Teaching," in The Semi-Professions and Their Organization, ed. A. Etzioni (New York: The Free Press, 1969), pp. 1-53.

[6]Vera E. Reilly and Myron H. Dembo, "Teachers' Views of Inservice Education: A Question of Confidence," Phi Delta Kappan 57 (October 1975): 126.

Part of the problem is the belief that close friendships are a prerequisite for team teaching. However, many experienced team members disagree with this belief. As one told us "you don't have to love someone to work with him."

Teachers lack experience in giving and receiving constructive criticism about professional matters, a lack that contributes to interpersonal problems in teaching teams. These problems can be minimized, however, if team members stick to two basic rules for giving constructive criticism. One, unless you can offer a better method or approach, you are only insulting, not helping. Two, all criticisms should be kept within the team.

Many conflicts are not personality clashes at all. They are often the result of organizational problems such as insufficient meeting time or inadequate support from administrators. Both personality and organizational problems are likely to be resolved if they are periodically discussed. Setting aside a time at each team meeting to "air grievances and appreciations" can help reduce frustrations and maintain open lines of communication.[7] Changing the leader of a team sometimes improves interaction. If necessary, teams can be broken up into pairs that get along. A flexible transfer policy between teams and schools can also help reduce conflict.

Unequal participation. Another common problem, especially in large teams, is an imbalance in the contributions of team members. One or two members may dominate all team meetings. Experimenting with different team leadership arrangements such as rotating team leaders or using task leaders may result in a more balanced team. Another technique for encouraging participation is for one team member to serve as a group facilitator. This member's prime responsibility is to insure that on critical issues everyone's opinion is voiced and considered. Listening to tape recordings of their meetings may alert the team to problems of uneven participation.[8]

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[7] Sheila Molnar, "Life in Teams," unpublished paper, p. 13.

[8] Molnar, p. 12.

Poor attendance at team meetings. Many teachers are skeptical of the value of team meetings, and this skepticism can result in poor attendance. Considering teachers' experience with school meetings in the past, this skepticism is understandable. Too often teachers are passive listeners at tedious, unproductive faculty meetings. Teachers must be convinced that team meetings are different. One major difference is that each team member has a say in setting agendas. Another is that most decisions are important since they affect the day-to-day activities of each team member. Moreover, important schoolwide policy decisions are often discussed at team meetings. Teachers in schools with teams have been shown to have more say in schoolwide decisions than do teachers in schools without teams.[9]

Resistance of parents and community. When a team teaching approach is adopted, the reactions of the parents and community are often unfavorable. Parents are apt to suspect that any innovation is a move to deemphasize the basic skills. They need to be shown how team teaching can add to, not detract from, the overall instructional program. Teachers can make special presentations on team teaching to the parents' association or at a school "open house." They can explain their team teaching program during home contacts. They might prepare a special "Team Teaching Newsletter" for home delivery or invite parents to attend team meetings.

Encouraging volunteer work in the school may increase community and parent support for a team teaching program. One way to make effective use of parent and community volunteers is to post a daily list of activities with which the team needs help. Volunteers can then read over this list, know immediately what needs to be done, and sign up for the activities they enjoy and can do well.

Summary

The investment of time and effort required for successful team teaching is a large one, but the payoffs are also great. The chance to

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[9]Rudolph Johnson, Teacher Collaboration, Principal Influence, and Decision Making in Elementary Schools, Technical Report No. 48 (Stanford, California: Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching, 1976).

specialize in areas of one's interests and skills, to participate in helpful and supportive collegial interaction, and to implement a varied and balanced instructional program has persuaded many teachers to give team teaching a try. Too often, however, their initial enthusiasm has turned to frustration and anger and they have retreated to the isolation of their own classrooms. Most of these disappointed teachers attribute their failure at teaming to personality clashes. But even old and dear friends have difficulties learning to team teach effectively. There is more to it than simply getting along well.

We have emphasized the neglected but crucial element of preparation in developing viable teaching teams. The lack of adequate preparation is a powerful alternative explanation for the short life-span of the typical teaching team. As Elizabeth Cohen points out, "We have been witnessing an organizational innovation [team teaching] trying to survive in the face of no effective in-service preparation or support."[10]

In this paper we have provided some guidelines to help teaching teams get started, make the most of their meetings, and deal effectively with common problems. We hope these suggestions, coupled with hard work, will allow teachers who are planning to team teach to succeed where others have failed. For, unlike the song about succeeding in business, the best way to succeed in team teaching is by really trying.

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[10]Cohen, p. 15